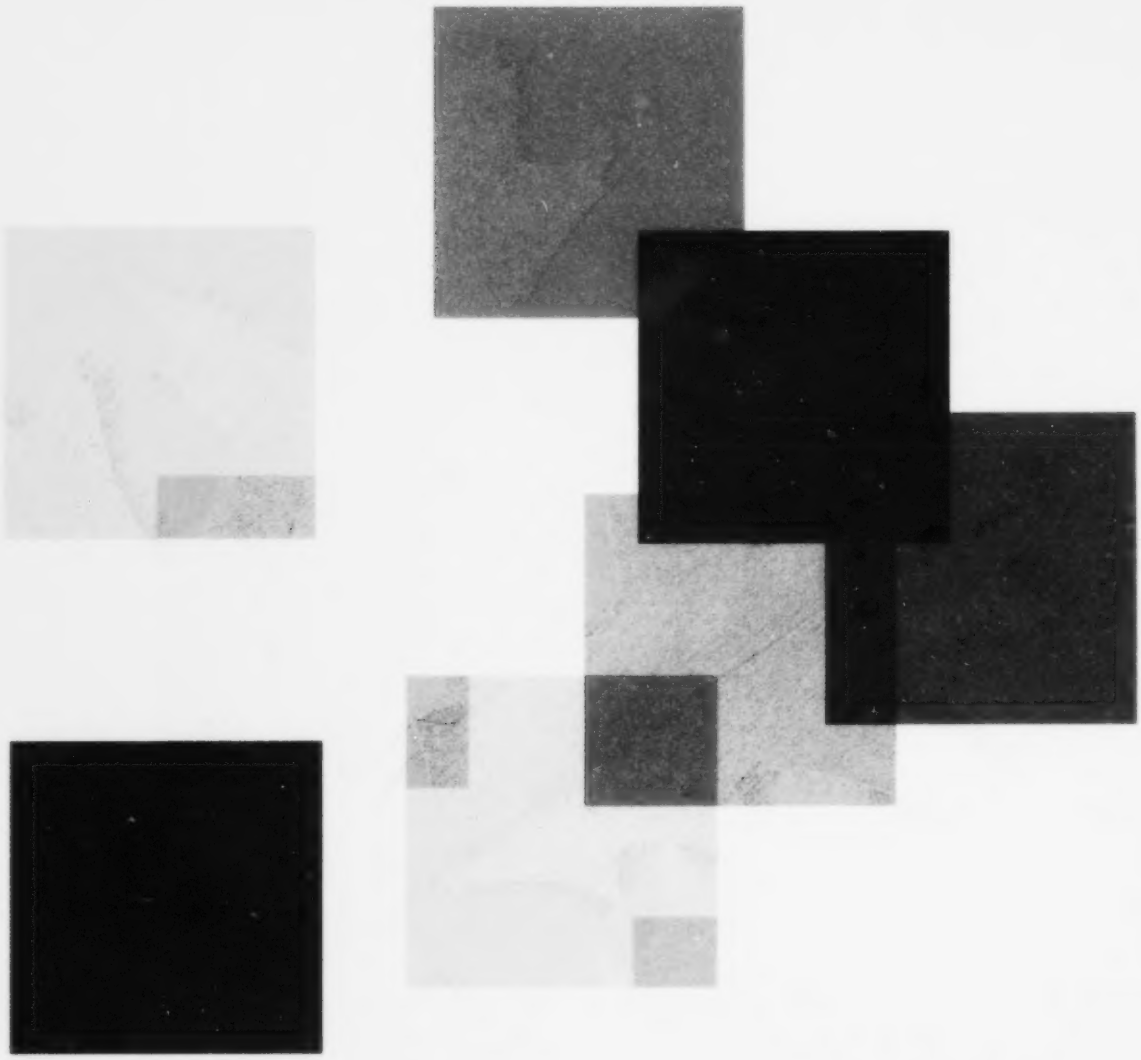
# NOVA SCOTIA ELDER ABUSE STRATEGY:

## *Towards Awareness and Prevention*



Seniors' Secretariat

Giving Nova Scotia Seniors a Voice

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# NOVA SCOTIA ELDER ABUSE STRATEGY:

## *Towards Awareness and Prevention*

Seniors' Secretariat

Giving Nova Scotia Seniors a Voice

The Nova Scotia Seniors' Secretariat is the provincial government agency responsible for seniors. The secretariat consults extensively with government departments, seniors, and voluntary seniors' groups to coordinate the planning and development of government policies, programs, and services for seniors.

The secretariat serves as a single entry point to government for seniors. It responds to seniors' issues and concerns and provides information on all matters related to aging through a toll-free information line, information resource library, consultations, and various publications and directories, such as the annual *Programs for Seniors.*

The Seniors' Secretariat consists of the Ministers of Health, Community Services, Education, Service Nova Scotia and Municipal Relations, and Health Promotion. The Minister of Health serves as the Chairperson of the secretariat and is Nova Scotia's Minister Responsible for Seniors. The secretariat is staffed by an Executive Director and seven permanent staff.

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## Message from the Honourable Angus MacIsaac

**Minister of Health, Chairperson of the Seniors' Secretariat**

I am pleased to present the *Nova Scotia Elder Abuse Strategy: Towards Awareness and Prevention*. During the next three and a half years and beyond, this strategy will lead the collective efforts of government, seniors, and our many community partners as we take action to preserve the health, dignity, and quality of life of seniors. We must work together in Nova Scotia to make sure that seniors feel safe in their homes and communities.

Elder abuse of any kind is unacceptable. Every Nova Scotian deserves to be safe from being harmed by those who live with them, care for them, or are in day-to-day contact with them. As a government and as communities we share a responsibility to provide seniors with the information they need to protect themselves from abuse and to offer protection to those who are most vulnerable.

Raising public awareness is key to addressing elder abuse. In Nova Scotia we must create an environment where this complex and difficult issue is openly discussed. We need to change attitudes and behaviours and help victims come forward. When they do extend their hands for support, we must ensure that help is there for them.

Our government is committed to addressing elder abuse. Nova Scotia's first elder abuse awareness day will be proclaimed on November 2, 2005 and every year thereafter.

I encourage you to join the Seniors' Secretariat and its partners in implementing *Nova Scotia's Elder Abuse Strategy: Towards Awareness and Prevention* and consider how you might contribute.

## Message from Valerie White

**Executive Director of the Nova Scotia Seniors' Secretariat**

The problem of elder abuse is of great concern to many Nova Scotians. Over the years countless individuals and organizations have contributed their time and expertise to reach this important milestone—the release of the *Nova Scotia Elder Abuse Strategy: Towards Awareness and Prevention.*

Most recently, more than 30 individual and organizational stakeholders served on our Elder Abuse Awareness and Prevention Strategy Committee and its working groups. These representatives are from a wide variety of disciplines including social work, policing, law, government, and health. Together, they discussed this broad and complex issue and prioritized the actions needed to prevent and respond to elder abuse in Nova Scotia. On behalf of the Seniors' Secretariat I want to offer a heartfelt thanks to all of you who have been involved in this effort.

We are now looking forward to sharing this strategy with a wide variety of seniors, stakeholders, and community partners throughout the province so that actions and initiatives to prevent and respond to abuse are undertaken at all levels, particularly in communities. As the strategy is implemented, the secretariat looks forward to continuing its leadership role and expanding the network of seniors' groups, stakeholders, and community partners who can help raise awareness about this important issue.

Please consider how you can help create an environment where seniors are valued. Elder abuse prevention needs to be everyone's concern!

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Nearly 700 Nova Scotians turn 65 each month. With seniors now numbering approximately 132,600, and with that number expected to nearly double by 2026, the importance of addressing abuse of older adults will continue to grow in Nova Scotia.

The *Nova Scotia Elder Abuse Strategy: Towards Awareness and Prevention* is the result of significant collaboration and consultation on the issue of elder abuse in Nova Scotia. Overall, more than 30 individual and organizational stakeholders collaborated to identify the priorities for action outlined in the strategy. During the next three years and beyond, the Nova Scotia Seniors' Secretariat will use the strategy to lead the efforts of government and its many community partners to further address the issue of elder abuse in Nova Scotia.

In the very broadest sense, elder abuse is the infliction of harm on an older person. It involves any act, or failure to act, that jeopardizes the health and/or well-being of an older person. Such action or inaction is especially harmful when it occurs within a relationship where there is an expectation of trust. There are several types of abuse: physical abuse, sexual abuse, emotional abuse, violation of human/civil rights, financial abuse, and neglect.

The ultimate goal of this strategy is to promote the health and well-being of older Nova Scotians through the prevention and awareness of abuse. The four strategic areas within the strategy focus on the key areas believed to have the greatest opportunity for impact: education and awareness, prevention of financial abuse, community-based networks, and resources and supports. Each strategic area identifies initial and future actions that will move Nova Scotia closer to becoming a province where older adults are protected, know their rights and how to act on them, and are aware of available resources.

**Education and Awareness**

*Initial Actions*

1. Develop and implement an education and awareness campaign to inform seniors and the general public about what elder abuse is, how to prevent it, and the resources available to them.
2. Educate caregivers, care providers, and general service providers on preventing, recognizing, and responding to elder abuse.

**Prevention of Financial Abuse**

*Initial Actions*

3. Educate seniors about financial abuse, including what it is, how to prevent it, and what to do if it happens.
4. Support government and community partners in their efforts to increase awareness of financial abuse.

*Future Actions*

5. Educate key service providers such as financial institutions and legal professionals on elder abuse, in general, and detecting and responding to financial abuse, in particular.
6. Engage financial institutions and legal organizations in the delivery of education sessions and awareness activities.
7. Educate those involved with the administration of justice on the issue of financial abuse of seniors.
8. Raise the profile and perceived importance of the financial abuse of seniors to emphasize the seriousness of abusive acts and ensure that society's response reflects the harmful impact of these acts on the life of an older person.
9. Advocate for the development and enforcement of government policies that protect individuals from financial exploitation.

**Community-Based Networks**

*Initial Actions*

10. Develop sustainable community-based networks made up of multiple stakeholders and seniors' groups to provide leadership and coordination within communities to prevent and address elder abuse.

*Future Actions*

11. Promote connections among community-based networks in order to facilitate learning and share information and resources.

**Resources and Supports**

*Initial Actions*

12. Advocate for the development of necessary supports and resources that respond to the abuse of seniors.
13. Ensure that abuse of older adults is included in broader family violence prevention efforts across the province.

*Future Actions*

14. Advocate for the development of policies that prevent and respond to elder abuse and contribute to the protection of older adults, ensuring that they reflect and address the very broad scope of issues inherent in elder abuse.
15. Where policies exist, ensure that enforcement of those policies occurs to the fullest extent possible in order to deter the perpetration of abuse in the first place and to penalize those who commit an offence.

The *Nova Scotia Elder Abuse Strategy: Towards Awareness and Prevention* provides the framework within which prevention efforts will occur in Nova Scotia over the next several years. While the Nova Scotia Seniors' Secretariat is responsible for leading the implementation of the strategy, sustainable resources must be sought from all levels of government and community partners to carry out the actions identified.

This strategy attempts to build on the extraordinary work done in Nova Scotia both to prevent and to respond to this very complex issue. It clearly identifies elder abuse education as the key to moving forward.

# ABOUT THE STRATEGY

Strategic action and coordinated responses are required to ensure that the efforts and resources dedicated to preventing elder abuse are effective. The *Nova Scotia Elder Abuse Strategy: Towards Awareness and Prevention* establishes the framework within which efforts to prevent the abuse of older Nova Scotians will occur over the next several years.

**Background**

The *Elder Abuse Strategy: Towards Awareness and Prevention* arises from many years of collaboration and consultation on the issue of elder abuse in Nova Scotia. In 2000, the Nova Scotia Seniors' Secretariat, in consultation with its Elder Abuse Advisory Committee, developed an elder abuse strategic plan to identify the many partners and issues to consider in tackling the complex issue of elder abuse. This built on the work of the government's Family Violence Prevention Initiative, which operated from 1995 to 2000.

The Government of Nova Scotia committed to implementing a five-year elder abuse strategy in its 2003 *Blueprint for a Better Nova Scotia*. At that time, the secretariat invited many of the potential partners to help identify priority actions for the next five years and share information and resources aimed at preventing the abuse of older adults.

In 2004, the Elder Abuse Awareness and Prevention Strategy Committee (as this committee became known) developed and broadly distributed a brochure, *Elder Abuse, We can't always see it ... but we know it's there*, and provided advice to the Department of Health on needed changes to the Adult Protection Act. (Members of the Elder Abuse Awareness and Prevention Strategy Committee and its working groups are listed in the Appendix.)

As this work was being carried out, committee members continued the demanding task of identifying priorities, assessing the current environment, and engaging additional stakeholders in the development of a strategy for moving forward. Early in its deliberations, the topics of education and awareness and preventing financial abuse were identified as the committee's main areas of focus. Soon after, working groups were established to identify and recommend initial and future actions to address these priority areas.

Overall, more than 30 individual and organizational stakeholders collaborated to identify the priorities for action outlined in the *Elder Abuse Strategy: Towards Awareness and Prevention*. During the next three years and beyond, the Nova Scotia Seniors' Secretariat will use the strategy to lead the efforts of government and its many community partners to further address the issue of elder abuse in Nova Scotia.

This strategy reflects the current priorities and environment for planning and implementation in Nova Scotia.

**Guiding Principles**

Several basic principles underlie the initial and future actions for preventing and addressing abuse against older adults contained in this strategy.

*Capacity Building*

This strategy recognizes the inherent ability and responsibility of individuals and communities to play a leading role in preventing abuse against older adults. The Elder Abuse Awareness and Prevention Strategy Committee believes that in order to truly effect change, the capacity of individuals and communities must be developed and supported through increasing awareness and understanding of the issues. Capacity should also be built through providing information, skills, and resources to all individuals. These efforts will facilitate the inclusion, involvement, and empowerment of those who have traditionally not been part of developing their communities.

*Collaboration and Coordination*

The complexity of issues related to the abuse of older adults necessitates a coordinated, integrated response from government and community stakeholders that represent multiple sectors. Efforts are required to build on and combine the many strengths of community groups, organizations, individuals, and government agencies and departments. Doing so can effectively prevent abuse, lead to planning and implementation of programs and services, and create safe environments for older Nova Scotians.

*Cultural Diversity*

How abuse or mistreatment is defined or viewed varies across cultures, and cultural practices and beliefs may contradict those of the dominant culture. Understanding and respecting cultural differences and developing culturally appropriate responses to the abuse of older adults from diverse communities is vital.

*Understanding Individual Context*

Individual context is extremely important in understanding the experience of abuse. Just as each person is different and her or his life circumstances vary, the response to each case of abuse must be different. A "cookie cutter" approach cannot be applied to the complex situations experienced by older persons. Efforts must be made to fully understand the unique circumstances and influences on the older person's life, the resources and supports available, and the norms and values that shape her or his life and decisions. Only then can approaches to prevention and intervention be appropriate and effective.

*Inter-generational Relationships*

Educating youth about aging and the life cycle helps them develop positive views about older adults. Conversely, educating seniors about youth issues also contributes to more positive relationships through better understanding. Increasing opportunities for positive interaction between younger and older people will enhance respect between the generations based on mutual

understanding and effort. Positive inter-generational relationships will contribute to the reduction of ageist attitudes in our society, a root cause of abuse against older adults.

**A Note on Language**

While the word "elder," by itself, has many positive connotations, the phrase "elder abuse" implies abuse of frail, dependent, mentally incapable older adults. This strategy addresses a wide range of abuse issues and understands that those who experience abuse also include well, healthy, independent, and mentally competent older adults. The recommendations and activities identified within this strategy are intended to be inclusive and respectful of all older individuals, regardless of ability, mental status, and health status. Phrases such as "elder abuse," "abuse against older adults," and "abuse of seniors" are used interchangeably within this document, recognizing that language sometimes differs according to the perspective being applied.

Similarly, the term "abuse" has different connotations. Whether mistreatment, violence, exploitation, or cruelty, the word "abuse" is intended to be an inclusive term within this document (unless otherwise noted for purposes of clarity or emphasis). It is not meant to imply degree of severity. This strategy is grounded in the belief that *all* abuse is harmful to the individual and negatively affects her or his well-being.

# THE ISSUE OF ELDER ABUSE

Providing accurate, current information on the prevalence of elder abuse is a true challenge due to the lack of research, absence of common indicators, and little consensus on what even constitutes abuse. The best information available is that between 4 per cent[1] and 7 per cent[2] of Canadian seniors are abused. Because abuse and neglect are thought to be seriously under-reported, these figures are often challenged. Nearly 700 Nova Scotians turn 65 each month. With seniors now numbering approximately 132,600, and with that number expected to nearly double by 2026, the importance of addressing abuse of older adults will continue to grow in Nova Scotia.

Abused older persons come from all educational levels and social, economic, and ethnic backgrounds. They live in communities right across our province. The impact of elder abuse – whether it stems from neglect, physical abuse, sexual abuse, emotional abuse, violation of rights, or financial abuse – can be devastating. Abuse can lead to declining physical and mental health, depression, and even suicide. The impact of abuse bears heavily on our social, health, and justice systems. A focus on prevention will not only maintain the health and well-being of older Nova Scotians, but can also provide a true cost savings to our health and social systems.

Most abuse is committed by someone the senior knows, such as a family member, friend, caregiver, landlord, or care provider. Some seniors are more at risk than others, including older seniors, socially isolated seniors, seniors with reduced cognitive capacity, seniors with disabilities who are dependent, and seniors cared for by people with an addiction such as alcohol, drugs, or gambling. Many biological, social, and economic factors combine and interact to create differences in the life experiences of women and men. Because women have a longer life expectancy, women are disproportionately affected by abuse.

There is much to learn about the abuse and neglect of seniors including why it happens, how often it happens, why it is not reported, and the role of factors such as gender, dependency, isolation, and disability. Elder abuse and neglect are issues that need solutions involving all sectors of society.

**Definition of Abuse**

In the very broadest sense, elder abuse is the infliction of harm on an older person. It involves any act, or failure to act, that jeopardizes the health and/or well-being of an older person. Such action or inaction is especially harmful when it occurs within a relationship where there is an expectation of trust. There are several types of abuse:

*Physical abuse* is the infliction of pain, injury, or discomfort on an older adult. It can involve physical assault (e.g., hitting, shaking, pulling, hair pulling, rough handling), medication abuse (over/under medication), physical restraint, and medical maltreatment.

*Sexual abuse* is any form of sexual activity with a person without the consent of that person. It can include unwanted sexual touching, sexual relations without voluntary consent, or the forcing or coercing of degrading, humiliating, or painful sexual acts.

*Emotional abuse* is the infliction of anguish or emotional pain. It can involve name calling, humiliation, threats or intimidation, provoking fear, emotional deprivation, treating the older person like a child, and isolation.

*Violation of human/civil rights* is the unlawful or unreasonable denial of the fundamental rights and freedoms normally enjoyed by adults. It can involve denial of information, denial of visitors, denial of opportunity for religious worship, denial of the right to provide informed consent to medical treatment, interference with maii, or unwarranted confinement in a hospital or institution.

*Financial abuse* is the unethical or illegal misuse of the money, property, or other assets of an older adult, including placing inappropriate pressure on an older person in order to gain access to her or his assets. It can involve the improper withholding of finances, fraud, theft (e.g., of pension cheques, securities, bonds, property and possessions, etc.), misappropriation of funds or property, misuse of power of attorney, pressuring the older person to change the terms of her or his will or hand over pension cheques, inappropriately taking control of the older person's assets, misuse of assets, or coercion.[3]

*Neglect* is the failure to provide the necessities of life such as proper food, fluids, suitable clothing, a safe and sanitary place of shelter, proper medical attention, personal care, and necessary supervision. The intentional withholding of the necessities of life is referred to as active neglect; and the unintentional failure to provide proper care is referred to as passive neglect. The latter is often a result of lack of knowledge, experience, or ability to provide care. Self-neglect occurs when older adults are not willing or able to perform essential self-care tasks and live in ways that disregard their health or safety needs.

Some abusive actions are defined as crimes, but not all abuse is considered criminal. The Criminal Code of Canada describes the different offences that someone can be charged with if they are accused of abusive actions toward older adults. The relevant provisions relate to physical and sexual abuse, chronic psychological abuse, neglect, loss of rights (as under the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms), property theft, breach of trust and breach of power of attorney, extortion, fraud and false pretences, and intimidation[4]. Because not all behaviour deemed abusive falls under the Criminal Code, a range of resources and supports are necessary to be able to respond to cases of abuse. It is also important to note that while the definitions presented here are commonly accepted in the field of gerontology, definitions contained within legislation may vary. This becomes relevant when one looks to available legal responses, and it emphasizes the need for a range of resources and supports.

# LEGISLATIVE ENVIRONMENT

The approach to preventing abuse against older adults in Nova Scotia needs to be established and applied with an understanding of the environment in which prevention strategies are planned and implemented. Nova Scotia has two specific pieces of legislation of direct relevance to preventing and responding to abuse of older adults: the Adult Protection Act and the Protection of Persons in Care Act. Understanding how the law protects Nova Scotians and recognizing the parameters of those laws informs how additional efforts and resources should be applied to protect all older Nova Scotians.

**Adult Protection Act**

This piece of legislation, enacted in 1985, serves to protect people aged 16 years or older who are abused or neglected and who cannot physically or mentally protect or care for themselves. The act includes a mandatory reporting provision that obligates individuals who know of or suspect that an adult is in need of protection to report any such information, even if the information is confidential or privileged. The Nova Scotia Department of Health administers Adult Protection Services within the Continuing Care branch. Approximately 75 per cent of persons assisted under the act are seniors[5].

The Adult Protection Act protects those adults who are unable to protect themselves. The act defines an adult in need of protection as someone who is 16 years of age or older who is abused or neglected and who cannot physically or mentally protect or care for herself or himself. In most cases, the act does not apply to adults who are mentally competent. The act includes situations of financial abuse only when it is experienced in conjunction with another form of abuse.[6]

In 2004, the Department of Health initiated an extensive public consultation process, inviting feedback into possible changes to the Adult Protection Act. Proposed changes to the act will be presented to the provincial legislature in the near future.

**Protection of Persons in Care Act**

The Protection of Persons in Care Act aims to protect individuals in care and applies to hospitals, residential care facilities, nursing homes, homes for the aged or disabled persons under the Homes for Special Care Act, and any other institution or organization deemed a "health facility." The act creates a duty for those employed in the administration of a health facility to protect patients and residents from abuse or neglect. It includes a mandatory reporting provision for service providers and a voluntary reporting provision for all others.

This act was passed in the legislature in October 2004 and has not yet been proclaimed, meaning it is not yet in effect. At the time of writing this strategy, the regulations for the act were under development. Proclamation of the act is anticipated in late 2005.

# STRATEGIC AREAS

The ultimate goal of this strategy is to promote the health and well-being of older Nova Scotians through the prevention and awareness of abuse. There are many broad issues related to elder abuse and to creating environments in which older people thrive. Many of these issues (such as financial security, housing, valuing seniors) are being addressed through the Nova Scotia Task Force on Aging's *Strategy for Positive Aging in Nova Scotia* to be released in the fall of 2005[7]. The *Nova Scotia Elder Abuse Strategy: Towards Awareness and Prevention* will contribute to achieving the positive aging goals. Improvements made to the lives of older adults and empowering seniors to support themselves and make informed decisions will strengthen their ability to protect themselves from abuse and empower them to access necessary supports.

The four strategic areas within this *Elder Abuse Strategy: Towards Awareness and Prevention* focus on the key areas the Elder Abuse Awareness and Prevention Strategy Committee believes will have the greatest impact to prevent and respond to abuse against older adults in Nova Scotia. Each strategic area identifies recommendations and activities that will move Nova Scotia closer to becoming a province where older adults are protected, know their rights and how to act on them, and are aware of available resources. It is recognized that this will take a significant investment of time, energy, and resources. A process of building on successes along the way and making adjustments in response to changing environments will also be required.

The four strategic areas are

- **Education and awareness**
- **Prevention of financial abuse**
- **Community-based networks**
- **Resources and supports**

In keeping with the government's commitment to implement a five-year elder abuse strategy, the recommendations in this strategy are divided into "Initial Actions" and "Future Actions." The Initial Actions are identified as high priority and necessary first steps in preventing abuse against older adults and will be acted upon within the remaining three and a half years of the five-year strategy. The Future Actions are equally important, but are subsequent strategies and may be acted upon beyond the original five-year strategy time frame. Opportunities will, however, be maximized to address all actions within the five-year elder abuse strategy. The identified activities contained within each Initial Action do not appear in order of priority.

The *Nova Scotia Elder Abuse Strategy: Towards Awareness and Prevention* is founded on the belief that preventing elder abuse is a responsibility of every member of society and that partnerships and collaboration are the key to effective and appropriate actions. Partners to be engaged throughout this strategy include primary health care providers, continuing care agencies and facilities, law enforcement agencies, legal information and law professionals, financial institutions, district health authorities and community health boards, federal, provincial, and municipal government agencies and departments, seniors' groups, non-profit organizations, community-based groups and organizations, academic institutions, research communities, interagency committees on family violence, caregiver support organizations, faith communities, media, and any other individual or organization committed to the issues.

**Education and Awareness**

Despite numerous and ongoing attempts to increase awareness of elder abuse, there is still a resistance to acknowledging that it happens and to openly discussing it. As with the increased level of awareness around child abuse and spousal abuse decades ago, elder abuse must be brought to the forefront so that people will talk about it, recognize it, and respond to it in a way that communicates that it is unacceptable in our society. Education will equip seniors with the knowledge necessary to protect themselves, take control over

their lives, better understand their experiences, and help them access services and resources that are available. Education will help professionals, families, and the general public better understand their roles and responsibilities, respond effectively, provide appropriate and meaningful support to those who have experienced or are experiencing abuse, and help them to effectively link older adults with community resources.

While every individual needs to understand the issues of elder abuse, there are several specific groups of people who would benefit from targeted education and awareness strategies because of the nature of the relationship they have with older adults. These groups include caregivers, care providers, and general service providers. While the terms used to describe these groups can vary, for the purposes of this strategy, the following definitions apply:

*Caregiver* refers to family, friends, or neighbours who provide unpaid care and/or support to an individual.

*Care provider* refers to a paid person who provides care and/or support to an individual in community or institutional settings. "Care provider" can refer to an individual or an agency/organization that provides care services. For the purposes of this strategy, care provider refers to individuals and organizations that predominantly provide care and/or support to older adults.

*General service provider* refers to an individual who provides any type of service to older adults and others. This includes people in a wide range of companies or organizations such as utility workers, postal workers, home repair professionals, taxi drivers, hairdressers, and bank tellers, among many others.

The important element that differentiates these groups of people is the nature of the relationship with the older adult. The expectation of trust is strongest in

care giving relationships where the relationship is based upon concern, affection, and/or obligation. Care provider/care recipient relationships also have a high expectation of trust but are determined by professional ethics and societal expectations. While relationships with general service providers tend to be more distant and less emotional, expectations of trust do exist. All groups, however, are in unique positions to be able to recognize and respond to experiences of abuse and are therefore specifically included in strategies for education and awareness. The special relationship that many faith communities have with older adults also places them in a position to be able to respond meaningfully.

This strategy recognizes that education is not just about providing new information, it is also about changing attitudes, behaviours, and values.

*Initial Actions*

1. **Develop and implement an education and awareness campaign to inform seniors and the general public about what elder abuse is, how to prevent it, and the resources available to them.**
   - 1.1 Work with diverse communities in developing and applying culturally appropriate education and awareness strategies and activities.
   - 1.2 Maximize the use of available communication mechanisms to reach older Nova Scotians and develop new ones where needed.
   - 1.3 Ensure that a variety of educational materials are created, including plain language resources, in order to meet the needs of individuals with various literacy levels.
   - 1.4 Advocate for and support senior-led education and awareness activities on elder abuse.
   - 1.5 Develop and apply communication mechanisms and strategies that specifically target isolated seniors, including those living in rural communities.
   - 1.6 Recognize World Elder Abuse Day and encourage others to participate in this and other awareness events.

1.7 Inform seniors and the public about rights and responsibilities and how to act on them as they relate to reporting abuse.

1.8 Develop and promote the use of a website that educates about elder abuse and provides links to available resources.

2. **Educate caregivers, care providers, and general service providers on preventing, recognizing, and responding to elder abuse.**

2.1 Support and promote services and programs that provide support to family caregivers, emphasizing the importance of self-care and paying particular attention to the role women play as unpaid caregivers.

2.2 Advocate to have the recognition and prevention of elder abuse included in the curriculum for all health professionals, particularly for those whose primary role is to provide direct care to older adults.

2.3 Develop and offer education and training programs on aging to general service providers, including how to communicate effectively with older adults.

2.4 Develop and distribute information and resources on the delivery of culturally competent care.

2.5 Host conferences and/or workshops for professional groups to increase their understanding of elder abuse, including their professional roles and reporting responsibilities.

2.6 Support care and general service providers in their efforts to identify and respond to individuals they serve who have experienced or are experiencing abuse.

2.7 Engage traditional "gatekeepers" in the prevention and identification of elder abuse, including faith communities, in-home visiting programs, and general service providers.

**Prevention of Financial Abuse**

Financial abuse is commonly accepted as the most prevalent form of abuse against older adults[8] and it can have devastating effects on the life of an older person. For women, in particular, the impact of experiencing financial abuse can be especially devastating given that they are more likely to live in poverty[9]. The Elder Abuse Awareness and Prevention Strategy Committee believes the issue to be so important that it warrants specific attention and needs strategies targeted towards its prevention. For this reason, the prevention of financial abuse has been established as a distinct strategic area within the overall strategy.

Because there are different forms of financial abuse (e.g., fraud, theft, coercion, abuse or misuse of power of attorney) and it is perpetrated by a range of individuals (e.g., stranger, family, caregiver, care provider), a range of options is necessary in responding to it. There is a need to educate widely, starting with seniors themselves, but also extending to all individuals who are in a position to be able to recognize when abuse is occurring. Clearly identifying responsibilities and options available will help individuals and communities respond to the financial abuse of older adults.

This strategy recognizes the efforts being made in a variety of sectors to educate the public and seniors on the issue of financial abuse. This strategy aims to build on and support those efforts.

*Initial Actions*

3. **Educate seniors about financial abuse, including what it is, how to prevent it, and what to do if it happens.**
    - 3.1 Inform seniors of the importance of safeguarding their financial assets (e.g., cash, bonds, debit and credit cards, etc.) and suggest ways of doing so.
    - 3.2 Increase awareness of seniors about the issues related to legal protection of their finances (e.g., wills, powers of attorney, etc.).

3.3 Inform seniors of their rights in regards to business transactions and legal matters.

3.4 Develop and disseminate educational materials for seniors on how to conduct business successfully (e.g., surviving the marketplace, tips, and buyer beware messages).

3.5 Encourage seniors to report incidents of financial abuse and seek assistance when necessary.

**4. Support government and community partners in their efforts to increase awareness of financial abuse.**

4.1 Encourage government and community partners not yet engaged in educating seniors to become involved and work with local communities in delivering education sessions.

4.2 Create an inventory of government and community partners who educate seniors on issues related to finances and financial abuse.

4.3 Develop and encourage the use of consistent key messages among government and community partners related to the financial abuse of older adults.

4.4 Promote awareness sessions and educational material related to financial abuse to seniors groups.

4.5 Facilitate partnerships between government and community partners and seniors groups to deliver education programs.

*Future Actions*

**5. Educate key service providers such as financial institutions and legal professionals on elder abuse, in general, and detecting and responding to financial abuse, in particular.**

**6. Engage financial institutions and legal organizations in the delivery of education sessions and awareness activities.**

7. **Educate those involved with the administration of justice on the issue of financial abuse of seniors.**

8. **Raise the profile and perceived importance of the financial abuse of seniors to emphasize the seriousness of abusive acts and ensure that society's response reflects the harmful impact of these acts on the life of an older person.**

9. **Advocate for the development and enforcement of government policies that protect individuals from financial exploitation.**

**Community-Based Networks**

While provincial and regional policies are an important part of preventing and responding to abuse against older adults, the key to addressing the root of the issue lies at the community level. Supporting communities will go a long way in ensuring that recognition, response, and support are offered in the most appropriate way to those who experience abuse. A community response recognizes and builds on the strengths of individuals and the collective strengths of communities. It allows for varied responses, depending on the capacity and resources available and the unique characteristics of the community.

*Initial Actions*

10. **Develop sustainable community-based networks made up of multiple stakeholders and seniors' groups to provide leadership and coordination within communities to prevent and address elder abuse.**
    - 10.1 Foster a sense of ownership at the community level for the prevention of abuse against older adults.
    - 10.2 Engage culturally diverse populations at the community level in the development of supports and resources to ensure that they are culturally responsive.

10.3 Identify and facilitate linkages among individuals, organizations, and groups with an interest in preventing the abuse against older adults.

10.4 Support existing community leaders and develop new ones by providing information, skills, and resources needed for individuals to assume and be successful in those leadership positions.

10.5 Support community-based networks in their efforts to increase awareness and educate about elder abuse.

10.6 Encourage community-based networks to develop strategies that reach isolated seniors in their communities.

10.7 Support networks in their efforts to develop a range of options in responding to elder abuse, particularly in rural areas.

10.8 Engage community health boards and district health authorities at the local level in the prevention of elder abuse.

10.9 Assist networks in developing and implementing strategies for sustainability.

*Future Actions*

**11. Promote connections among community-based networks in order to facilitate learning and share information and resources.**

**Resources and Supports**

Efforts to prevent and respond to abuse against older adults can succeed only in an environment that supports and facilitates that work. Ensuring that adequate resources and supports are in place across the province will strengthen the ability of communities to come together and address the issue of abuse against older adults.

*Initial Actions*

**12. Advocate for the development of necessary supports and resources that respond to the abuse of seniors.**

12.1 Explore the feasibility of establishing a 1-800 line with a live operator as a mechanism for information and referral.

12.2 Establish and promote the Nova Scotia Seniors' Secretariat as a clearinghouse and dissemination vehicle for resources and information on abuse against older adults.

12.3 Seek sustainable resources from all levels of government and community partners for elder abuse education and awareness activities.

12.4 Engage culturally diverse populations at the community level in the development of supports and resources to ensure that they are culturally responsive.

12.5 Establish and support informal networks among seniors to enable early identification and intervention through informal channels and the provision of support prior to the escalation of risk and/or crisis.

12.6 Develop sustainable services and programs that prevent and respond to elder abuse, particularly in rural communities.

**13. Ensure that abuse of older adults is included in broader family violence prevention efforts across the province.**

13.1 Educate inter-agency committees on family violence on the issue of abuse against older adults and how it fits within the family violence context.

13.2 Encourage and assist inter-agency committees on family violence to address the abuse of older adults within their family violence prevention activities.

13.3 Facilitate partnerships between inter-agency committees on family violence and seniors' groups in efforts to prevent and address family violence.

13.4 Educate community and government partners on the added complexities of spousal abuse when it occurs in later life, including its impact on how older women use available services and programs.

13.5 Support inter-agency committees on family violence and other groups in their efforts to educate youth on abuse and the development of healthy relationships.

13.6 Foster positive relationships between youth and seniors through supporting and facilitating inter-generational programs and activities.

*Future Actions*

**14. Advocate for the development of policies that prevent and respond to elder abuse and contribute to the protection of older adults, ensuring that they reflect and address the very broad scope of issues inherent in elder abuse.**

**15. Where policies exist, ensure that enforcement of those policies occurs to the fullest extent possible in order to deter the perpetration of abuse in the first place and to penalize those who commit an offence.**

# IMPLEMENTATION AND MONITORING

This strategy provides the framework within which elder abuse prevention efforts will occur in Nova Scotia over the next several years. While the Nova Scotia Seniors' Secretariat is responsible for providing leadership in the implementation of the strategy, sustainable resources must be sought from all levels of government and community partners to carry out the recommended actions. As identified earlier in this document, Initial Actions will be the focus for the next three and a half years, while opportunities to implement Future Actions will also be maximized. The strategy, therefore, is intended to guide the province in the remaining years of the five-year elder abuse strategy and beyond. A detailed implementation plan will be developed in the fall of 2005 outlining the key steps in completing the actions, including timelines, roles and responsibilities of partners, and indicators to measure progress and strategy achievement. The implementation of the *Nova Scotia Elder Abuse Strategy: Towards Awareness and Prevention* will be grounded in the guiding principles (described on page 5).

With guidance from the Elder Abuse Awareness and Prevention Strategy Committee, the Nova Scotia Seniors' Secretariat will monitor the strategy. Additional government and community partners and stakeholders will also be engaged in the process of tracking progress and facilitating implementation of the strategy.

# CONCLUSION

Extraordinary work has been done in Nova Scotia both to prevent and to respond to the very complex issue of elder abuse. This strategy attempts to build on that work and clearly emphasizes education as the key direction for moving forward. The Nova Scotia Seniors' Secretariat and the Elder Abuse Awareness and Prevention Strategy Committee look forward to working with the many stakeholders and partners in this important work. There is a role for everyone in this strategy and the committee and the secretariat will attempt to support all who are committed to this issue.

# Appendix: Members of the Elder Abuse Awareness and Prevention Strategy Committee and Working Groups

| | |
|---|---|
| Joanne Pushie | Adult Protection Services, Nova Scotia Department of Health |
| Rob Turnbull | Adult Protection Services, Nova Scotia Department of Health |
| Rose Brooks | African United Baptist Association of Nova Scotia – Women's Institute |
| Don MacKinnon | Better Business Bureau of Maritime Provinces |
| Sharon Reashore | Caregivers Nova Scotia |
| Barbara Carthew | Community Links |
| Ann Cosgrove | Community Representative |
| Georgina Fitzpatrick | Credit Union Central of Nova Scotia |
| Joan Harbison | Dalhousie University, School of Social Work |
| Veronica Matthews | Eskasoni First Nations community |
| Blair Boudreau | Group of IX Nova Scotia Seniors' Organizations |
| Linda Savage | Halifax Peninsula Community Health Board |
| Regan Fong | Halifax Regional Police Community Relations/Crime Prevention |
| Maria Franks | Legal Information Society of Nova Scotia |
| Marlene MacLellan | Nova Scotia Community College, School of Health and Human Services |
| Denise Moore | Nova Scotia Advisory Council on the Status of Women |
| Stephanie MacInnis-Langley | Nova Scotia Department of Justice |
| Kay Rogers-Lidstone | Nova Scotia Office of the Ombudsman |
| Chris Pottie | Nova Scotia Securities Commission |
| Lisa MacLeod | RCMP, Commercial Crime Section |
| Nancy Noble | RCMP, Commercial Crime Section |
| Keith Brumwell | RCMP, Community Policing |
| Omer Blinn | Regroupement des Aînées et Aînés de la Nouvelle-Écosse |
| Pam McKinley | Seniors Mental Health Centre, Valley Regional Hospital |
| Brenda Lewis | Seniors Safety Coordinator, RCMP Digby Detachment |
| Gerald Hashey | Service Nova Scotia and Municipal Relations |
| Connie Duchene | Shoreham Village |
| Bill Hughes | Social Development Canada |

Nova Scotia Seniors' Secretariat

| | |
|---|---|
| Heather Praught | Chair of Elder Abuse Awareness and Prevention Strategy Committee |
| Valerie White | Executive Director, Ex-Officio Committee Member |
| Jane Cowie | Elder Abuse Consultant |
| Barb Baker | Elder Abuse Consultant |

## Glossary of Terms

*Adult in need of protection* is defined by the Adult Protection Act as any person 16 years of age or older who is abused or neglected and cannot physically or mentally protect or care for herself or himself.

*Adult Protection Act* is a piece of Nova Scotia legislation that serves to protect people aged 16 years or older who are abused or neglected and cannot physically or mentally protect or care for themselves. The act includes a mandatory reporting provision that obligates individuals who know of or suspect that an adult is in need of protection to report any such information, even if the information is confidential or privileged.

*Caregiver* refers to family, friends, or neighbours who provide unpaid care and/or support to an individual.

*Care provider* refers to a paid person who provides care and/or support to an individual in community or institutional settings. "Care provider" can refer to an individual or an agency/organization that provides care services. For the purposes of this strategy, care provider refers to individuals and organizations that predominantly provide care and/or support to older adults.

*Criminal Code of Canada* is the federal law that sets out what actions are considered criminal offences, the procedures for dealing with offences, and the sentencing of persons found guilty of an offence. For more information, visit <http://laws.justice.gc.ca/en/C-46/index.html>.

*Elder abuse* is the infliction of harm on an older person. It involves any act, or failure to act, that jeopardizes the health and/or well-being of an older person. Such action or inaction is especially harmful when it occurs within a relationship where there is an expectation of trust.

*Emotional abuse* is the infliction of anguish or emotional pain. It can involve name calling, humiliation, threats or intimidation, provoking fear, emotional deprivation, treating the older person like a child, and isolation.

*Financial abuse* is the unethical or illegal misuse of the money, property, or other assets of an older adult, including placing inappropriate pressure on an older person in order to gain access to her or his assets. It can involve the improper withholding of finances, fraud, theft (e.g., of pension cheques, securities, bonds, property, and possessions, etc.), misappropriation of funds or property, misuse of power of attorney, pressuring the older person to change the terms of her or his will or hand over pension cheques, inappropriately taking control of the older person's assets, misuse of assets, or coercion.

*General service provider* refers to an individual who provides any type of service to older adults and others. This includes people in a wide range of companies or organizations such as utility workers, postal workers, home repair professionals, taxi drivers, hairdressers, and bank tellers, among many others.

*Neglect* involves the failure to provide the necessities of life such as proper food, fluids, suitable clothing, a safe and sanitary place of shelter, proper medical attention, personal care, and necessary supervision. The intentional withholding of the necessities of life is referred to as *active neglect;* and the unintentional failure to provide proper care is referred to as *passive neglect*. The latter is often a result of lack of knowledge, experience, or ability to provide care. *Self-neglect* occurs when older adults are not willing or able to perform essential self-care tasks and live in ways that disregard their health or safety needs.

*Physical abuse* is the infliction of pain, injury, or discomfort on an older adult. It can involve physical assault (e.g., hitting, shaking, pulling, hair pulling, rough handling), medication abuse (over/under medication), physical restraint, and medical maltreatment.

*Protection of Persons in Care Act* is a piece of Nova Scotia legislation that aims to protect individuals in care. It applies to hospitals, residential care facilities, nursing homes, homes for the aged or disabled persons under the Homes for Special Care Act, and any other institution or organization deemed a "health facility." The act creates a duty for those employed in the administration of a health facility to protect patients and residents from abuse or neglect. It includes a mandatory reporting provision for service providers and a voluntary reporting provision for all others.

*Sexual abuse* is any form of sexual activity with a person without the consent of that person. It can include unwanted sexual touching, sexual relations without voluntary consent, or the forcing or coercing of degrading, humiliating, or painful sexual acts.

*Violation of human/civil rights* is the unlawful or unreasonable denial of the fundamental rights and freedoms normally enjoyed by adults. It can involve denial of information, denial of visitors, denial of opportunity for religious worship, denial of the right to provide informed consent to medical treatment, interference with mail, or unwarranted confinement in a hospital or institution.

# Notes

1. Podnieks, E., et al. (1990). *National Survey on Abuse of the Elderly in Canada : The Ryerson Study*. Ontario: Ryerson Polytechnical Institute.

2. Bunge, V. P. (2000). "Abuse of Older Adults by Family Members" in *Family Violence in Canada: A Statistical Profile*. Ottawa: Statistics Canada.

3. Excluded from this definition of financial abuse are issues of physical security (e.g., home invasions or mugging). The primary issue in these cases is not financial abuse and often occurs outside of a relationship where there is an expectation of trust.

4. Poirier, D., and N. Poirier. (1999). *Why Is It So Difficult to Combat Elder Abuse and, in Particular, Financial Exploitation of the Elderly?* Law Commission of Canada.

5. Nova Scotia Department of Health (2004). *Adult Protection Act Discussion Paper*.

6. More information on the *Adult Protection Act* can be found on the Department of Health's website (Continuing Care section) at www.gov.ns.ca/health/ccs or by calling 1-800-225-7225. (If out of province, call 1-902-424-4288.)

7. The Nova Scotia Task Force on Aging is supported by the Nova Scotia Seniors' Secretariat. Visit www.gov.ns.ca/scs for more information, or call 1-800-670-0065.

8. Podnieks, E., et al. (1990). *National Survey on Abuse of the Elderly in Canada: The Ryerson Study*. Toronto: Ryerson Polytechnical Institute.

9. Statistics Canada, 2001 Census.

NOVA SCOTIA